

ECOWAS

Introduction: Prospects and Challenges of ECOWAS

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Chart 1: Political map of ECOWAS



Chart 1 is a political map of ECOWAS.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established on 28 May 1975 via the Treaty of Lagos, with the mandate to promote economic integration. It was formed to create a single trade bloc through economic cooperation. Its vision, as summarised in the ECOWAS Treaty, is *"promoting co-operation and integration, leading to the establishment of an Economic Union in West Africa to raise the living standards of the peoples, and to maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations-among Member States and contribute and contribute to the progress and development of the African Continent"*.

Subsequently, in 1993, the Lagos Treaty was revised to focus more on regional integration, specifically in the areas of peace, security, conflict prevention, and resolution.

ECOWAS is one of the eight regional economic communities (RECs) recognised by the African Union with a total landmass of 5 112 903 km². It consists of 15 member states (see Chart 1). According to the 2023 World Bank country income group classification, ECOWAS is composed of six lower-middle-income countries (Benin, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal) and nine low-income economies (Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone and Togo). Eight countries in the Community (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali,

Niger, Senegal, and Togo) belong to the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), which uses the CFA as its currency (though there are again efforts to [change](#) this) whilst the remaining countries continue to hold on to their national currencies.

Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali are landlocked countries.

The region is endowed with vast deposits of natural and mineral resources including petroleum (Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana), gold (Ghana, Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea), diamonds (Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ghana), uranium (Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal), phosphate (Senegal, Togo), manganese (Burkina Faso, Togo, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire), salt (Senegal, Ghana, Guinea, Cabo Verde) and more. The region also boasts about 11% of global dense tropical forests, although it has lost about [one-third](#) of its mangrove forests in the last 25 years.

The region's climate can be divided into two zones: the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea. Annual temperature is above 28C, and annual rainfall ranges from 200 mm in the North to over 2 000 mm in the South.

Since its formation, the Community has steadily progressed in advancing its vision. To some extent, it succeeded in creating a “*borderless*” region to facilitate trade and integration among member countries. Citizens of member countries generally enjoy free movement through the ECOWAS identity card. Based on the [2023 African Visa Openness Report](#), citizens of 10 member countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo and Guinea) do not require visas to travel to any country in the region. The remaining five countries require a visa on arrival.

However, there are still significant challenges that impede the vision of ECOWAS. It faces a widespread threat of terrorism and general insecurity. Outbreaks of health pandemics such as Ebola and COVID-19 worsened developmental outcomes. The Sahel countries (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Nigeria) face an imminent danger of climate change. Moreover, the vision of regional integration through economic and monetary union with a single currency (the ECO) has yet to be manifested. The region also faces numerous [developmental challenges](#), such as recurring power outages and inadequate and poor health and transport infrastructure. Other challenges include tariff and non-tariff barriers, skill deficiencies and a high unemployment rate, especially among the youth.

Recent governance and geopolitical development also undermine the region's peace, security and integration. Already, three member countries (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) under military leadership have proposed a separate confederation and officially communicated their decision to exit the regional bloc effective January 2025 given the “illegal, illegitimate, inhumane and irresponsible sanctions” levied against them after the unconstitutional changes in government. This is after accusing the leadership of [ECOWAS of deviating](#) from its founding principles and also failing to help them combat terrorism and insecurity.

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Mr Enoch Randy Aikins joined the AFI in May 2021 as a Researcher. Before that, Enoch was a research and programmes officer at the Institute for Democratic Governance in Accra in charge of local governance reforms, poverty and inequality and public sector reforms. He also worked as a research assistant (economic division) with the Institute for Statistical Social and Economic Research at the University of Ghana. Enoch's interests include African politics and governance, economic development, public sector reform, poverty and inequality. Enoch is a Young African Fellow at the School of Transnational Governance, European University Institute in Florence and has an MPhil in economics from the University of Ghana, Legon.

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